

Child Refugees in Conflict zones



STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

A refugee is a person who is forced to flee his or her country or homeland for safety, usually as a result of internal conflict or war with another country. Although children make up half of the world's refugee problem, the long term future of refugee children still does not receive sufficient attention in the general debate of the refugee issue and in particular in the finding of lasting



solutions. Over the last 60 years millions of generations of children have been born and raised as refugees, with no real opportunity of returning to their homeland or of finding employment in the countries sheltering them. Child refugees suffer in countless ways as a result of the conflict in their country and their ensuing displacement. Many of them have witnessed horrors beyond imagination, such as the violent torture and death of their loved ones

and the destruction of their communities. These already traumatized children must start new lives away from their homes, growing up in unstable and fractured environments, while often also becoming breadwinners for their families. They receive no education and are often exploited into illegal child labor. Child refugees are also at greater risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking, and forced military recruitment.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM:

Throughout human history, there have been refugees as a result of war, persecution and other hazards. Conflicts within the 20th century have been particularly notable in the sheer numbers of growing refugees.

WWII

The end of WWII brought in its wake the largest population movements in European history, with more than 40 million displaced refugees. Most of them included Germans fleeing from Eastern

Exploitation: to take advantage of someone with negative consequences

Trafficking: organized criminal activity in which human beings are treated as possessions to be controlled and exploited

Genocide: the systematic and planned extermination of an entire national, racial, political, or cultural group

Europe, Jews that had survived the horrific genocide of the Nazis, and Eastern Europeans fleeing the forced installation of Communist regimes in their homeland. In 1951 the UN conference on the status of refugees and displaced persons was held in Geneva. The ensuing UN Convention stipulated the definition of a refugee and was later augmented by a 1967 protocol broadening refugee recognition beyond an initial focus on Europeans displaced after WWII. At present 147 nations are parties to either the 1951 convention or the 1967 protocol.

THE YUGOSLAV WARS

Between 1991-2001, a series of wars were fought in Yugoslavia over sovereignty issues between the republics within its territory. The wars were mainly characterized by ethnic conflicts among the different peoples living in Yugoslavia, particularly the Serbs and Montegrins on one side and the Croats and Bosnians in Bosnia on the other. Often described as Europe's deadliest conflict since WWII, it became well known also for the horrific war crimes carried out. The conflict led to the displacement of 2.7 million people, many of them children. Unlike most refugee situations, approximately 2.5 million of them have been able to return home since the wars ended, largely in part to UN coordinated assistance and aid.

VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War ended on April 30, 1975 with the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Army after a bitter civil war involving North and South Vietnam, as well as the Americans. The initial refugee flight of South Vietnamese was precipitated by the ensuing withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam and the threat of execution and punishment by the Northern communist government. These refugees were termed 'boat people' because many of them fled by boat and ship after the war, especially during 1978 and 1979 but also into the 1990's.

Sovereignty: complete independence and self-government

War crimes: acts that violate int'l laws, treaties, customs and practices governing military conduct

Begging for help

Bosnian camps filled with hungry children, desperate refugees

By JOE CALLAHAN
STAFF WRITER

TEARS rolled down the cheek of Alic Hairija as the 48-year-old Muslim mother begged for help in getting her 19-year-old son out of a Serb jail.

Hairija sobbed uncontrollably after she announced that the last time she saw her boy was when she caught a glimpse of him on television as Serbian nationals led him down the steps of an unknown camp and into a room.

"That was in 1995, and I haven't heard from him since," Hairija wailed, as an interpreter translated. "Please help me find him. I must see him. I must see him. I know he's not dead. He's just got to be alive."

Hairija is just one of hundreds of individuals and families living at Visca Refugee Center near Zivnice, a series of two-story apartment buildings down winding, one-lane roads about two miles off the main highway.

Shortly after noon, reservists with the 351st Military Police Company of Ocala left their camp in bedrock and patrolled several towns before arriving at Visca to pass out candy to children begging for food.

On the way to the area, one Bosnian child looked at

PLEASE SEE BOSNIAN ON 12A



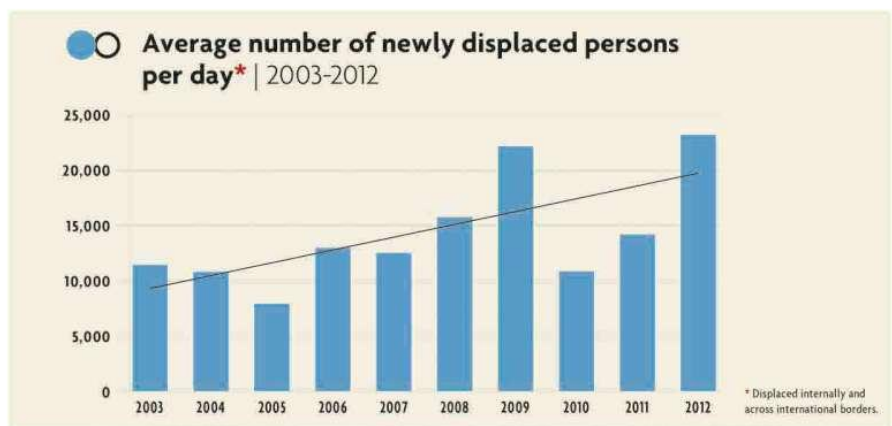
Muslim refugees plead for help in getting information on their children imprisoned in Serb jails. The women know nothing of the children's fates and look for anyone who can help. The camp, near Zivnice, is filled with families displaced by the war.



The number that left and arrived safely between 1975-1995 totaled 800,000, many of them children. Others failed to survive the passage due to danger from pirates, overcrowded boats, and storms. The initial mass flight caused an international humanitarian crisis. Very quickly the neighboring Southeast Asian countries became unwilling to accept any more displaced peoples and many languished in refugee camps until they could be resettled in developed countries. The conditions at the camps were very poor, allowing women and children to be physically and sexually abused. More than half of the refugees would eventually end up in the United States, making up one of the largest refugee groups to ever settle in the U.S. since the 1970's.

DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM:

The world is experiencing its most serious child refugee crisis for almost 20 years, as conflicts in the Middle East and the African continent have forced millions of people to flee their homes. While NGOS (non-governmental organizations) and host governments have attempted to build refugee camps in order to receive and care for large groups fleeing, the numbers are simply too much to handle. Once in these camps, the goal of resettlement is not easily achieved, as the conflicts continue to wage and the homes they once lived in have been destroyed. The longer children remain in these camps, the longer they remain at risk for disease, soldier and terrorist recruitment, and physical and sexual violence. There are 700 refugee camps at the latest estimate. With the recent Syrian civil war and its displacement of almost a million children, the failure to address the refugee issue in a lasting way has become alarmingly apparent.



AFRICA

Due to the many conflicts within the African continent over the last couple of decades, there are hundreds of thousands of young children who are living as refugees. Recent years have seen a huge surge in the number of them as unresolved conflicts continue to ravage various parts of

NGOs: Non-governmental organizations

Developed countries: nations that have highly developed economies and higher standards of living



Africa. Somalia, for example, experienced a significant rise from ongoing battles waged between Islamic insurgents and government backed forces. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is another area that saw a spike in child refugees due to the incessant tribal clashes that have been ongoing for several years without pause. UNICEF has been drawing world attention to how acute the problem has become in parts of Africa, noting the serious risks that these children face as they cross borders illegally in search of safety. Girls in particular are more vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse and exploitation.

MIDDLE EAST

Throughout history the Middle East has been a vital major crossroads for culture and ideas, as well as peoples. However, like other troubled regions, the Middle East has produced and hosted millions of refugees over the past decades. The conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria have led to immense instability due to the millions of displaced peoples. Afghanistan is the largest source of refugees, but soon stands to be surpassed by Syria, as its conflict shows no signs of abating. The level of trauma and psychological distress among the child refugees in the Middle East is appalling and despite great efforts, humanitarian agencies have not had the capacity to respond adequately to their needs.

Case study –

Syria is poised to become the worst humanitarian disaster of our time. It had a long history of providing refuge to people in need of sanctuary, including Palestinians and Iraqis, which makes the current suffering all the more heartbreaking. In March of 2011 peaceful anti-government demonstrations born out of the Arab Spring quickly escalated after the government's violent crackdown. By July of that year army defectors had formed the Free Syrian Army and many civilians took up arms to join them. Divisions between secular and Islamist fighters and between ethnic groups continue to complicate the conflict. Now in its third year, the civil war has killed over 100,000 people, half of them civilians. Bombings have destroyed much of the cities, while human rights violations run rampant. This past April there were close to a million refugees, most fleeing to Jordan and Lebanon. Mercy Corps and other NGOs have been working in the region to help families acquire basic needs and services. More than half of the refugees are under the age of 18 and have lost parents, siblings, and friends. In June the UN issued its largest ever appeal for help- an estimate of \$5 billion needed.

Arab Spring: a series of activities ranging from political protests to civil wars that happened in a number of Arab countries, including Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria beginning in the early months of 2011

Sanctuary: a place of refuge and protection



INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS:

The office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its mission is to ensure that everyone will have the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, with the goal of either eventually being able to return home or of being successfully resettled in a host country. In order to protect children of concern, the UNHCR partners with the children themselves, their communities, national authorities, relevant local and international groups (UNICEF), and humanitarian NGO's. The primary goals are to safeguard the most vulnerable, help reunite separated children with family, and engage them through education and sponsored activities. The UNHCR reported that over 45 million people, more than half children, have been displaced by the end of last year. Countries bearing the burden of refugees also tend to be those in the developing world and they often do not possess the available resources to provide for them.

“These truly are alarming numbers. They reflect the difficulties of the international community in preventing conflicts and promoting timely solutions for them.”

Antonio Guterres – Head of UNHCR

HOST COUNTRIES

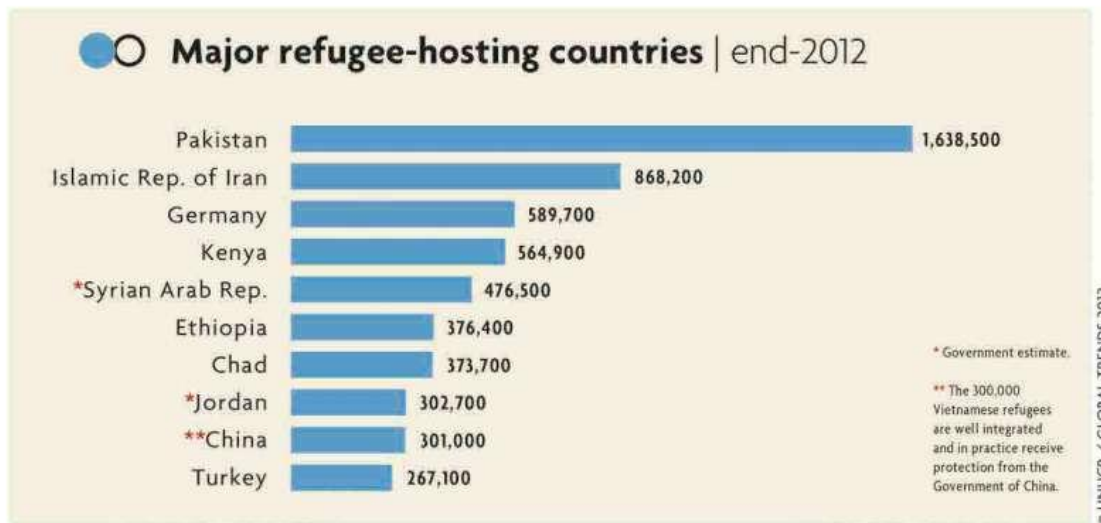
The story of child refugees cannot be told without also giving credit to the host countries that shelter them, often at enormous cost to themselves. The governments of these countries extend as much hospitality and aid as possible, working with the UN and humanitarian agencies to alleviate the suffering of the displaced. However, the capacity of host countries to help refugees is dangerously overstretched and their resources are limited. It is a challenge to balance the needs of their own societies with the needs of those that they are sheltering. Host countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon at present, require international support to stabilize their economies, allowing their governments to continue an open door policy for refugees.

Mandated: given authoritative command or instruction

Asylum: a place offering protection and safety

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

Hospitality: cordial and generous reception of or disposition toward guests



HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES (NGOS)

The efforts of humanitarian agencies in aiding child refugees is crucial, as they tend to be the best advocates for them and are pivotal in raising the funding needed to help them rebuild and stabilize their lives. While there are a great many, these are a few that stand out in the quest for displaced and endangered children everywhere.

International Rescue Committee was founded in 1933, the IRC is a voluntary NGO involved in providing life saving assistance to refugees forced to flee from war or disaster. They aid in resettlement, emergency relief, rehabilitation, and overall advocacy for refugees. Committed to restoring dignity and self-reliance, the IRC is a global symbol of hope and renewal for those who have taken flight.

War Child International is a family of independent humanitarian organizations working together to help children across the world affected by war. Their mission is to help create conditions that will allow young people living with or recovering from the effects of armed conflict to thrive.

Refugees International is dedicated to providing lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection to displaced people around the world and it advocates for refugees through diplomacy and the press.

Resettlement: the transportation of people to a new settlement after upheaval of some kind

Rehabilitation: to restore to good health or useful life, through therapy and education

Diplomacy: the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations and people

Save the Children is one of the leading independent organizations aiding children around the world. It responds to emergencies that put children's survival and livelihood at risk, particularly conflict and displacement.

Mercy Corps is a non-profit that provides emergency relief and supports development programs in agriculture, economic development, health services, housing and infrastructure, among others. Currently they are very active in aiding the Syrian refugees, particularly the children.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is your country's position on the rights of refugees?
- What major groups of refugees has your country provided asylum for and why?
- In what ways do the United Nations and other NGOs assist child refugees and have they been successful? What problems do they face?
- Why do you think the resettlement of child refugees is such a difficult task to accomplish?
- What solutions can you come up with to stem the rising numbers of child refugees?

Displacement: the act or condition of being displaced

Infrastructure: the basic facilities, services, and installations needed for the functioning of a community or government

Citations

- "Refugee children and their future." *Refugee Survey Quarterly*. Feb 2010. Web. 14 Jan 2014.
 <<http://rsq.oxfordjournals.org/content/27/4/6abstract>>.
- "Children." *The UN Refugee Agency*, n.d. Web. 14 Jan 2014. <<http://unhcr.org/pages/49c3646cle8.html>>.
- "Refugee 101." *Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services*, n.d. Web. 14 Jan 2014.
 <<http://brycs.org/aboutRefugees/refugee101.cfm>>.
- "European Refugee Movements After World War Two." *BBC*, n.d. Web. 15 Jan 2014.
http://bbc.co.uk/histor/worldwars/wwtwo/refugees_01.shtml>.
- "Syrian refugee children face 'catastrophic life' in exile, UN says." *theguardian*, 29 Nov 2013. Web. 15 Jan 2014.
 <<http://theguardian.com/global-development/2013/nov/29/syrian-refugee-children-catastrophe-exile>>.
- "Syria's refugee children: Alone, 'in crisis', UN report says." *CNN*, 29 Nov 2013. Web. 15 Jan 2014.
 <<http://cnn.com/2013/11/29/world/meast/syria-children-refugees-report/>>.
- "Africa's Child Refugees." *news24*, 17 March 2010. Web. 14 Jan 2014. <<http://news.24.com/Africa/news/Africas-child-refugees-20100312>>.
- "Struggle of the Middle East Refugees." *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 22 April 2013. Web. 15 Jan 2014.
 <<http://aucegypt.edu/gapp/cairoreview/pages/articleDetails.aspx?aid=330>>.
- "Quick facts: what you need to know about the Syrian refugee crisis." *Mercy Corps*, 17 Oct 2013. Web. 14 Jan 2014.
<http://mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria>>.
- "List of humanitarian organizations." *GlobalCorps*, n.d. Web. 15 Jan 2014. <<http://globalcorps.com/jobs/ngolist.doc>>.